UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1996/916
7 November 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 7 NOVEMBER 1996 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to my letters of 14, 24 and 29 October 1996 to the President of the Security Council regarding developments in eastern Zaire (S/1996/875, S/1996/878 and S/1996/888). Since the last of these letters the situation there has deteriorated dramatically.

More than 1.2 million Burundian and Rwandan refugees and tens of thousands of Zairians have been displaced by the fighting. Most of the refugees have abandoned their camps in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu and are moving westwards towards some of the most inhospitable and inaccessible areas in Zaire. Others have found their way to the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. Because of the severity of the fighting in and around the main towns and the breakdown of law and order, I was obliged for security reasons to authorize the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian agencies to withdraw their international staff temporarily to neighbouring countries. Those agencies have established stockpiles of relief supplies and their staff are eager to return but they cannot do so until they are assured of reasonable security conditions and of access to those in need.

Meanwhile, I decided on 5 November, after consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the heads of other concerned agencies of the United Nations system, to appoint Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Assistant United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to serve as Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes region, pending the recommendations on longer term arrangements for the coordination of the United Nations efforts in the Great Lakes region which I shall receive shortly from my Special Envoy, Mr. Raymond Chrétien.

The international community now faces a situation in which a million or more people are scattered in eastern Zaire beyond the reach of the agencies that can provide them with food and medical care. Unless effective action is taken urgently, many tens of thousands of human beings are going to die of hunger and disease. But this is not only a humanitarian crisis. The events of recent weeks have proved, if proof were needed, that peace and security will not be restored in the Great Lakes region unless the refugee problems created by the

internal conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda are resolved. Urgent humanitarian action is required; but it must also be action that will help to create the necessary conditions for the orderly and secure repatriation of the refugees.

The immediate requirement is to stabilize the situation and to create secure conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced persons. This will involve, amongst other things, the securing of airfields and border crossing points and the protection of logistics supply bases in eastern Zaire. It will also involve identifying and protecting accessible locations where the scattered refugees and displaced persons can be concentrated to receive help from the humanitarian agencies.

But this immediate response to the humanitarian emergency will also have to take into account less immediate considerations. All the Governments concerned acknowledge that there is a need for the early repatriation of the refugees. This is also the view of the international community. It will therefore be necessary to ensure that the short-term response does not re-create conditions in which refugees can again be intimidated by those who, for political reasons, do not want them to return to their home countries. On the contrary, the international community's response to this humanitarian crisis must mark the beginning of a programme of repatriation.

It is clear that in the prevailing conditions in eastern Zaire, these objectives cannot be achieved without the deployment, at least for a short period, of an international military force whose mandate would be to ensure the minimum security necessary to permit stabilization of the situation and enable civilian agencies to bring relief to the refugees and start preparing for their repatriation.

I have been considering what options exist for the establishment and deployment of such a force. Three in particular deserve study and have been discussed today with the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). They are as follows:

(a) The first would be for a group of Member States to decide to establish and contribute to a multinational force and to seek the Security Council's authority to do so. The force would operate under command and control arrangements agreed between the countries contributing to it. This option has been used in a number of cases in recent years. Its great advantage is that it permits the deployment of a well-equipped and well-supported force, with adequate financial backing, more rapidly than if the task was entrusted to the United Nations, while keeping open the possibility for a United Nations force to take over from the multinational force as soon as conditions permit;

(b) The second option would be to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force. The disadvantage of this option is that, as experience in recent years has shown, the United Nations lacks the capacity to deploy a strong enough force as quickly as is necessary to respond to a crisis of the kind that has beset eastern Zaire. But if the first option was chosen, a United Nations force could, as already stated, subsequently replace the multinational force;

(c) The third option would be the deployment of a regional force. While leaders of the countries in the region have given convincing evidence of their readiness and ability to take political action to address the problems in their region, they have indicated that they would need to be provided with financial and logistical support if they were to mount a substantial military force in the necessary time-scale. The provision of such support would itself, of course, require additional time. During their summit in Nairobi on 5 November, the regional leaders indicated their preference for the Security Council to take urgent steps to deploy a neutral force.

If either the first or second option is chosen, it will be necessary for the organizers of the force to concert closely with OAU and to consult with the countries of the region, especially those in which the force is to be stationed and/or will need facilities. In this connection I am able to report that on 6 November President Mobutu of Zaire informed my Special Envoy, Mr. Raymond Chrétien, that he fully endorsed the decisions of the previous day's regional summit in Nairobi and was agreeable to the deployment of an international force on Zairian territory.

Given the need for urgent action if tens of thousands of lives are to be saved, time is of the essence. This suggests that the best response to the current crisis would be the first option, by which Member States with the necessary capacity would take the lead in putting together a multinational force, in consultation with the Secretary-General of OAU and the regional States concerned, and would seek the Security Council's authorization to deploy it. I therefore welcome the fact that the Security Council is focusing its attention on this option.

I should be grateful, Mr. President, if you would make this letter available to the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI